

# Freemason Symbols and Their Masonic Symbolism

**"Courtesy of Masonic-Lodge-of-Education.com".**

A rough and perfect ashlar are stones which symbolize Man's moral and spiritual life.

Cutting stone to uniform shapes and sizes requires the skill and experience of a true craftsman with many years of experience.

This is why, historically, only large edifices were made of ashlars (rather than brick or wood), due to the necessity (and difficulty) of assembling the many skilled craftsman needed to complete the many subsets of knowledge such as how to build a stone archway, how to lay foundation stone, and how to lay stone, one atop another to great heights...not to mention the artisans who sculpted the stones into ornamental shapes.

In days of old, apprentice masons cut and raised the Rough Ashlars from the stone quarry under the supervision of more experienced craftsman, called Fellow Crafts.

The work was accomplished under the watchful eye of the Master masons of the craft...those who had proved their ability to make their Master's piece to the satisfaction of their superiors.

In Freemasonry, there are 2 forms of ashlars.

## **Rough Ashlar**

In operative Freemasonry, the rough ashlar represents a rough, unprepared or undressed stone. In speculative Freemasonry, a rough ashlar is an allegory to the uninitiated Freemason prior to his discovering enlightenment.

## **Perfect Ashlar**

Operatively, the Perfect ashlar represents the dressed stone (after it has been made uniform and smoothed) by use of the working tools.

Only after the stone has been dressed by an experienced stonemason, can it be suitable to be placed into the architectural structure or building.

Speculatively, a Perfect Ashlar is an allegory to a Freemason who, through Masonic education, works to achieve an upstanding life and diligently strives to obtain enlightenment.

## **Rough and Perfect Ashlars**

In the Fellow Craft Degree, we see the use of the Rough and Perfect Ashlars. The lesson to be learned is that by means of education and the acquirement of knowledge, a man improves the state of his spiritual and moral being.

Like man, each Rough Ashlar begins as an imperfect stone. With education, cultivation and brotherly love, man is shaped into a being which has been tried by the square of virtue and encircled by the compasses of his boundaries, given to us by our Creator.

## **Rough and Perfect Ashlar: Fitted For the Builder's Use**

In ancient times, quarried stone which could be easily shaped into desired configurations, was called "freestone". Typical freestones are limestone and sandstone.

Then, as now, only after refining and smoothing these rough stones into their desired shape, were the stonemasons able to "fit them for the builder's use".

In the Fellow Craft degree, the Rough Ashlar represents a man's unrefined state and his need for improvement. He learns that the goal of being a better man includes spirituality of thought and striving for perfection of conduct. Via duties, expectations and obligations, he is charged to work toward these goals of self-improvement.

As the Freemason "smoothes" his rough edges, internally and externally; he becomes a better man and, therefore, a better Freemason.

Once a man has perfected his ashlar to the best of his ability,... as Brothers to all mankind, it is his duty to help others become better men and better Freemasons.

## **Rough and Perfect Ashlar - The Potential for Change**

All rough ashlar must have within them the potential to be made into a perfect ashlar.

The stone must be made of sound material and have a minimum of character flaws which may cause it to weaken the edifice. It must be capable of being worked into a perfect stone. This is why candidates for the degrees are asked many questions as to their qualifications and character about why they wish to become Freemasons.

The candidate must have the potential to both serve and support the Fraternity. He must be carefully inspected, just as each Rough Ashlar is inspected for quality in order to be able to "fit" him into Freemasonry's tenets and goals, which are compatible to God's laws.

An imperfect stone may be made perfect, however major flaws are difficult to overcome and when assembled into a structure, the entire structure can be weakened from its improper use. This is as true of men as it is of stones.

## **Rough and Perfect Ashlar - States of Metamorphose**

Freemasonry has a glorious history. Flawed ashlar can bring negative feelings and reproach upon the Fraternity from non-Freemasons in the outside world and therefore, can have no place within its walls.

...That said,...let us not forget that perfect ashlar are not found lying about the stone quarry without benefit of their having been hammered, chiseled and polished into such a state of being.

It also holds true that "perfect" men are also such an anomaly without the benefit of brotherly love, guidance and light. There are very few Freemasons who have not been in both the rough and perfect ashlar state-of-being at some point in their lives.

## **Altar**

In the center of American Lodge rooms is found a pedestal called an altar. On it is displayed the Holy Bible and other Holy Books, which are Masonically termed spiritual trestle boards. Its place in the center of the lodge room allows all the members to keep it in view, especially the Master of Lodge. It generally alludes to the altar that stood before King Solomon's temple.

## **Masonic Wages**

**Corn, wine and oil were the Masonic wages of our ancient brethren.**

How do you earn Masonic wages?

### **Operative Freemasonry Wages:**

**Master of the Work:** In ancient operative times, the Master of the Work received the highest wages. His wages were corn, wine, oil and sometimes the coin of the realm.

Fellow Craft and Entered Apprentice wages were less than the Master, but they were kept in "mete and drynk" (meat and drink).

**Speculative Freemasonry Wages:** In Speculative Freemasonry, Masonic wages are not earned in coin. They are the rewards earned through acts of kindness, good deeds of service, and the gift of your time to others.

They are earned by mentoring other brethren, helping others, remembering the widow and the orphan and visiting the sick. In short, wages are earned much as the biblical verse says:

"Do unto others as you would HAVE them do unto you."

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*From the Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Albert Mackey, Vol. 1, page 244, 1929*

## **Corn, Wine and Oil**

Corn, wine and oil are the Masonic elements of consecration. The adoption of these symbols is supported by the highest antiquity. Corn, wine and oil were the most important productions of Eastern countries; they constituted the wealth of the people, and were esteemed as the supports of life and the means of refreshment.

David enumerates them among the greatest blessings that we enjoy, and speaks of them as:

**Psalm 104: 15:** "wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart".

### **Anointed With Oil:**

In devoting anything to religious purposes, the anointing with oil was considered as a necessary part of the ceremony, a rite which has descended to Christian nations.

- The tabernacle in the wilderness, and all its holy vessels, were, by God's express command, anointed with oil;
- Aaron and his two sons were set apart for the priesthood with the same ceremony;
- ...and the prophets and kings of Israel were consecrated to their offices by the same rite.

Hence, Freemasons' Lodges, which are but temples to the Most High, are consecrated to the sacred purposes for which they were built by strewing corn, wine and oil upon the Lodge, the emblem of the Holy Ark.

Thus does this mystic ceremony instruct us to be nourished with the hidden manna of righteousness, to be refreshed with the Word of the Lord, and to rejoice with joy unspeakable in the riches of divine grace.

**Corn...The Staff of Life:** In processions, the corn alone is carried in a golden pitcher, the wine and oil are placed in silver vessels, and this is to remind us that the first, as a necessity and the "staff of life" is of more importance and more worthy of honor than the others, which are but comforts.

*End of Albert Mackey dissertation on Corn, Wine and Oil, our Masonic Wages.*

*Vol. 2 page 1110, 1929*

**Wine:** ...as a symbol of the inward refreshment of a good conscience is intended, under the name of the *Wine of Refreshment*, to remind us of the eternal refreshments which the good are to receive in the future life for the faithful performance of duty in the present.

*End of Albert Mackey dissertation on Wine, our Masonic Wages.*

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*Vol. 2 page 731, 1929*

**Oil:** The Hebrews anointed their Kings, Prophets and High Priests with oil mingled with the richest spices. They also anointed themselves with oil on all festive occasions, whence the expression in

**Psalm xlv, 7:** "God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness."

*End of Albert Mackey dissertation on Oil, as part of our Masonic Wages.*

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...And, thus, your unspotted white lambskin Masonic apron is a symbol reminding you of the necessity of the purity of heart, and uprightness of conduct in order to earn the Masonic wages which are due you.